

Just Amber

by Shadow Quil

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Summary: Amber Von Tussle is a product of her time and upbringing.

That does not mean she wants to be. Disclaimer: I do not own

Hairspray

Just Amber

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As one of the Nicest Kids in Town, there are certain things I am expected to be and do. Firstly, of course, always look happening, with that big show-stopper grin and perfect, Ultra-Clutch hair. Secondly, I must be perky and fun-loving " on camera, at least. I must be hip, cool and popular " which, obviously, I am " and I must be seen to get along with all my fellow dancers. Also, I must, as the prettiest, most popular girl my age in Baltimore, have 'the boyfriend', Link " a guy as cool and happening as me.

As Velma Von Tussle's daughter, there are a few more things I must be and do added to the previous list. Firstly, I should be clean and polite at all times. Next, I must do whatever it takes to win, win, win " even at the cost of friends, a boyfriend, and my self-respect. Most importantly of all, I can never _ever_ associate with coloured kids. It just isn't done in our society for nice white girls to be seen befriending Negroes " no exceptions.

From my life, I expected to get through school, marry Link as soon as we graduated, become Mrs. Amber Larkin, have two children " one boy, one girl " and be the perky mother/house-wife while Link went to work. This was the life my mother wanted for me, and so I thought I wanted it for myself. Link and I were dating, and everything pointed to me becoming Miss Teenage Hairspray; life was perfect.

I knew, always, that I would become my mother. Get through school, Miss Baltimore Crabs, marry money, have a kid, be a success. Get through school, Miss Teenage Hairspray, marry Link, have kids, be a success. She seemed happy, or at least content, to be the widowed

station manager who was pushing her daughter for success, so it couldn't be a bad life.

Joining the show was my mother's idea. She told me to get in front of the cameras as much as I could in my youth, because I would someday lose my looks and I should take advantage of them while I had them. I said nothing â€" this was usual, coming from my mother â€" and joined. Of course there was no audition, my mother was the station manager, and I became lead dancer on the show.

It was fun â€"my mother's pushing aside. In the beginning, it was just about getting my beauty seen while I was still young, but then I began to love dancing and performing. I fought my way to the front, as my mother told me, and showed off, because I was good at it, and I wasn't good at much else. My mother told me not to bother in school, because whatever they could teach would be useless anyway, so I was just passing. My mother told me to focus on being seen, so I stuck with fighting to the front of the stage and didn't bother with sports. My mother told me to practice, practice, practice, and so I never made real friends.

Once again, I didn't see a problem with this.

I avoided the Negroes, since my mother told me to, which I suppose was why I hated Tracey so much. Obviously, her size, face and unfounded popularity had something to do with it, be she had the choice to do what she wanted. Her mother would support her in anything â€" joining the show, befriending Negroes, dancing with Negroes, hanging out at Negro record stores. Not that I wanted to do these things â€" I was one of the true Nicest Kids in Town. I mean, hello Tracey, it's all in the song â€" nice white kids, not Negroes. Get a clue.

Link also surprised me, and not in a good way. He was like me â€" pressured by his dad to avoid Negroes and get noticed. I hated that he was able to stand up and wrench away, casting me off, joining Tracey and pulling that Negro girl onto the stage to dance. Everyone credits Tracey for the integration of the Corny Collins Show, but if it weren't for Link it would have taken months for full integration to occur.

When I look back at my teen years, I'm surprised just how I thought of people back then. I categorised everyone â€" ugly, fat, poor, Negroes. I was the poster-child for white supremacists; perky, blonde, blue-eyed, pretty, and felt that Negroes were below us on the social chain. For the record, I've change my tune since then â€" just so you know.

My eyes were truly opened the day of the Miss Teenage Hairspray pageant.

I danced my best, and I almost won. It was shocking at the time because, even then, I knew I wasn't the best dancer there. Then Tracey interrupted, and my title was stolen by a little Negro girl who's name will never escape me, since she went on to bigger, brighter things. Little Inez became a big star, dancing around the world and teaching other little Negro boys and girls, in places that had yet to be integrated, to keep hold of their dreams.

My mother had switched the ballads. She had so little faith in me

that she had cheated for my victory, and in the end I lost â€" almost graciously, at least â€" and she had been fired. My poor, narrow-minded mother was punished, at long last, for being a liar and a cheat. Unfortunately, with her out of a job, I had to give up on the standard of living I was accustomed to.

It was that day that I finally made a decision that greatly impacted my life.

I would not be my mother.

I tried so hard, so hard, to get over the beliefs she had pounded into me from a young age. There was nothing wrong with Negroes â€" they are people, just like me, only darker. No, they are people just like me, nothing else. No, we are equal, there is no they and me â€" equal.

It was hard, but was made easier over time. The more I socialised â€" much to my mother's dismay â€" the more open-minded I became. Heck, I even dated a Negro, a boy I had met during the Miss Teenage Hairspray episode that marked the integration of the show, but the taunting and the pressure became too much for me to bear and he broke it off for my sanity. It turns out I am not one of those groovy new-age checkerboard-chicks after all.

I am a coward.

I left school, married a nice white man with a good job, had three kids â€" all of them boys â€" and got on with a life of luxury with a maid to do my cleaning and a nanny to raise my children. It frightened me that I had accidentally let go of my morals and become my mother anyway.

Still, I'll never forget my Negro boyfriend from High School, and what he did for me.

He accepted me, for the narrow-minded brat I was.

He educated me, so I was no longer ignorant.

He loved me, so I knew romance beyond image.

He let me go when it became too much.

I will always on the surface appear to be Mrs. Amber Duncan, Velma Von Tussle's daughter through-and-through.

I will always, in my heart, be a checkerboard-chick.

I will never forget that handsome man who looked past the Velma-clone.

The first man ever to see just Amber.

End
file.